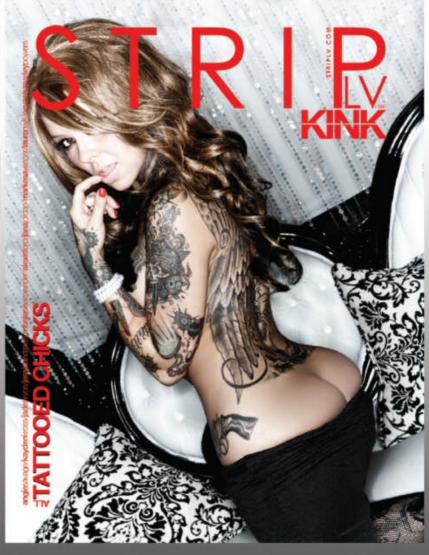




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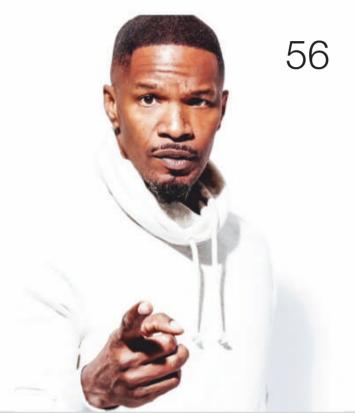
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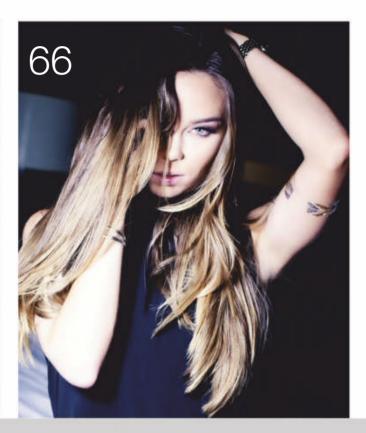
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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Patience is a virtue. One that we have all had to learn over the past year or so. We had to learn to respect those around us while doing our best to gauge the fear that they may be going through during the longest pandemic our globe has seen since the early 1900s. It created a year where we had to learn to grow our empathy and understanding. The misinformation and hysteria that swirled was a confusing and upsetting time for many. When you get this issue, I hope we are on a path to mending, and the lockdowns are becoming a thing of the past. It hasn't been easy for anyone. But if you can try to see the other side and not get too judgmental when someone sees something from another perspective, it will elevate who you are as a person. It's time that we come together instead of trying to divide. Finding real and true love comes when you can love someone with all of their flaws without expecting anything in return. Start with yourself first. You are one of the almost 8 billion people living on our planet right now. The world would not be the same without you. And if no one else tells you or makes you feel that way, let me be the one to say I am glad you are here. Enjoy the issue that features some proud and fearless females proud to share their beauty and their strong support for other women in not being afraid of their sexual selves.



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2021 MASERATI LEVANTE S GRANSPORT

The new 2021 Maserati Levante S GranSport is a tight ride in a sexy package. We took one of the babies out for a ride, and we are inclined to add it to our arsenal.

The 2021 GranSport enhances the Levante S' 424 hp twin-turbo V6, Skyhook adaptive damping air suspension, and Q4 intelligent AWD by amplifying its character with sport-inspired exterior and interior appointments.

The technology applied to every Levante is designed to offer outstanding performance both on- and off-road. Sophisticated suspension—double-wishbone on the front axle and multi-link on the rear, combined with electronically controlled damping, four corner air-springs providing five dynamic ride levels (plus one additional park-position), play an essential role in the car's handling. \$104,149 as test-driven. Available at maseratiusa.com.

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As we emerge slowly from this Covid-19 crisis, it comes as no surprise that our mental state collectively as a whole is very vulnerable. Mental health is an essential component of our overall wellbeing. Startups can often offer new and inventive solutions to problems in our society. Mentalhappy.com has done just that, providing a community to those in mental crisis and an anonymous place and community where they can share their troubles free from judgment. Generally, getting help for mental issues has been met with individual judgment and prejudices. Mental Happy offers a forum open to all and free from criticism. The start-up is now turning to social media and crowdfunding to fund its cause.

MentalHappy, a social network designed to help people improve their emotional wellbeing through positive peer support, announced its equity crowdfunding campaign on StartEngine. MentalHappy, a startup backed by Y Combinator – one of the most respected startup accelerators in the U.S. – provides people with a safe and secure platform to talk about the challenges they face in their daily lives, receive support from peers who understand these stressors, and learn practical tips and techniques to help members heal and improve their emotional fitness each day.

"I chose to raise funding for MentalHappy through equity crowdfunding for one reason: inclusion," said Tamar Blue, founder, and CEO of MentalHappy. "I built our social network on the foundation of inclusion because we believe happiness and mental clarity are a right, not a privilege and that no one should be denied access to emotional wellness support because of high costs, limited access or because they feel uncomfortable talking about the tough issues with the people around them. This same principle applies when deciding who we allow to invest in our startup."

Founders who don't raise money through crowdfunding severely limit who can invest in their company. They are only able to accept investments from institutional investors, like venture capital firms, and from angel investors. Angel investors are individuals who are deemed as accredited, meaning they make \$200,000 a

year as an individual (\$300,000 as a couple) or have a net worth over \$1 million. Most angel investors are white men, with only a small percentage of women and minorities falling into that category. In fact, a study conducted by the Angel Capital Association and Wharton Entrepreneurship, shows that angel investors are 78 percent male, 87 percent white and their average age is 58. Only 22 percent of angel investors are women, less than 4 percent are black or Hispanic and only 8 percent are 40 years old or younger.



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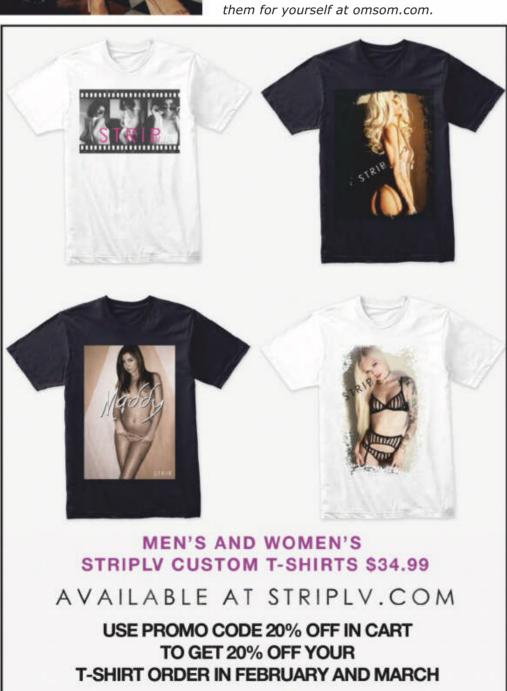
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OM SÒM

A VIETNAMESE PHRASE MEANING NOISY, RAMBUNCTIOUS, RIOTOUS. MOST OFTEN USED BY PARENTS (HINT: OURS) TO SCOLD UNRULY, RAUCOUS CHILDREN IN THE BACK OF THE CAR.



The new trend for 2021 is set to be custom spice blends. Omsom is the most buzzedabout brand in that product space. Started by sisters Vanessa and Kim Pham, whose parents were refugees from Vietnam. They grew up in their Mom's kitchen, eating her authentic Vietnamese cuisine. Partnering with top chefs in multiple types of Asian cuisine, the sisters are creating chef-curated starter packs to make authentic takes on Thai, Vietnamese, and now Japanese dishes. Each starter helps to create 2-3 authentic dishes. Get a sampler for \$29, try your hand at three different dishes and create up to 16 meals per starter pack. It's a new and reasonable way to bring new flavors into your kitchen. New recipes and spices are being added to their website as the popularity grows. Try them for yourself at omsom.com.





THE SAGE ROOM

BY VEGAS FOOD NERD

It's a seventy-four-year-old Stateline/Lake Tahoe institution. Located in Harvey's Hotel and Casino, in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, the Sage Room has been dazzling diners' palates since 1947. Originally located on the casino floor and situated now at the top of the resort on the 19th floor. The space is romantically lit and offers spectacular views of the lake. Book a table by the windows and enjoy the sunset over the glassy waters and captivating mountain views. The space is cozy and comfortable with western accents like wagon wheels, steer skulls, and other rustic touches. The booths are luxurious romantic tables, and the restaurant also features lamps built and donated to the resort by the Washoe Tribe.

The night that we visited it was in the middle of the pandemic and the staff was meticulous about following safety standards and still gave us impeccable service. This is a high-end dining experience with old-fashioned values. It's a throwback to the days of classic steakhouse dining.

We started with oysters on the half shell served with the classic cocktail sauce



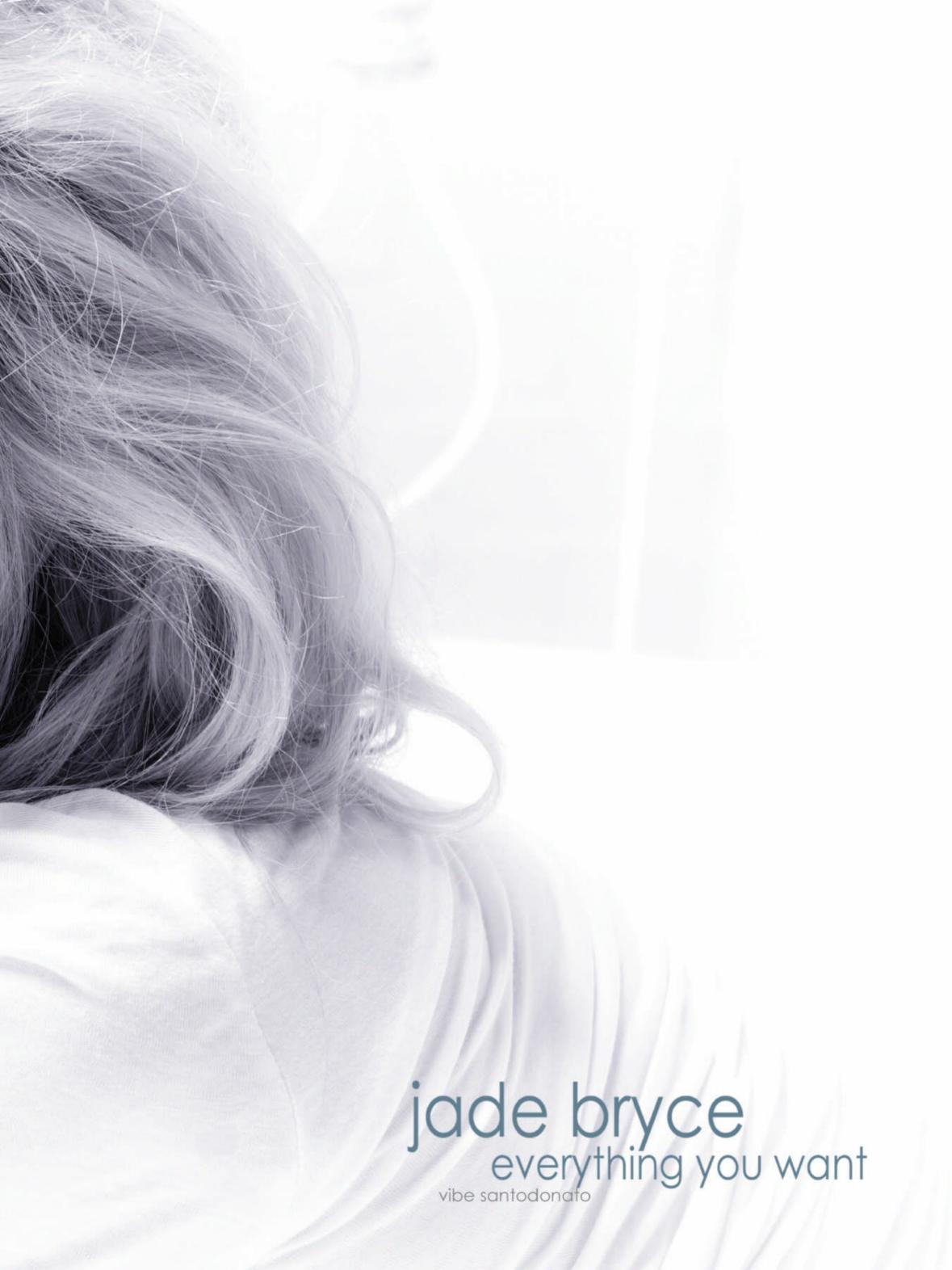
horseradish They were a clean, briny bright-tasting start to our meal, very fresh, and so good. Next, we sampled their Lobster Bisque. This creamy velvet soup was simply a perfect take on the classic gourmet dish. We ended our meal their signature chateaubriand-bouquetiere for two; roasted centercut beef tenderloin carved tableside served alongside

their duchess potatoes, roasted veggies, and a rich tangy béarnaise sauce. The meat was meltingly tender, and the duchess potatoes were pleasing to the eye as much as they were to the palate. It was a very generous portion of food. Almost too generous because that left no room for dessert, which was sad. The Sage Room is known for serving classic steakhouse deserts flambéed table side such as bananas foster and cherries jubilee. Once again just another reason why we will have to return to this dark cozy romantic spot again for another meal.

Check out more by Vegas Food Nerd at FoodNerdMag.com.





















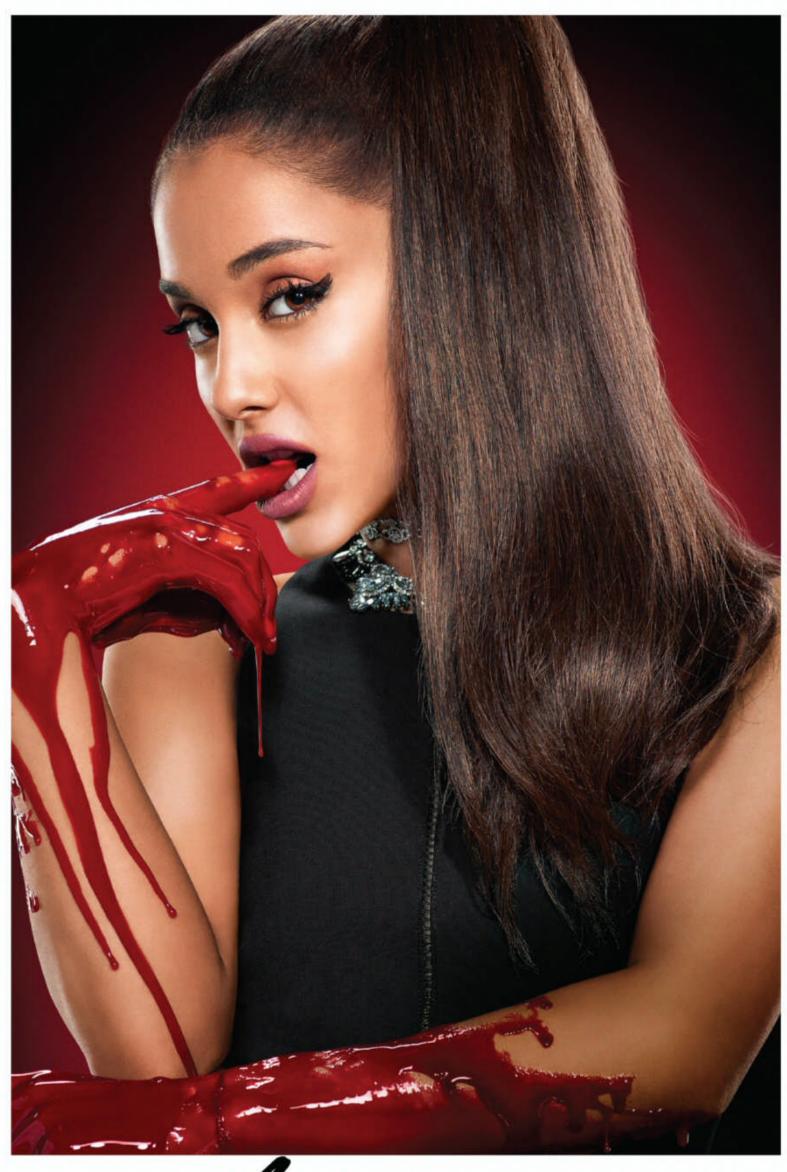


"For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; and for poise, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone."









by **lincoln**conway

riana Grande is ready to take on the world all-over again. The petite singer with the colossal voice released her latest album Positions to positive reviews in October 2020. Remarkably, it was her sixth studio album, a significant body of work already represented by someone so diminutive in stature you wonder how she can draw the energy for the extensive promoting and unrelenting touring, except, in 2020, there was none.

Even without all the face-to-face marketing and performing that truly propels an artist into the public's consciousness, the 27-year-old singer and former Nickelodeon TV star proved she can add substance to her pop reverie, with a repeated sexual undercurrent to her music that continues to take her further into uncharted territory and away from her first incarnation. It's all part of her accelerating maturity as a woman and her desire to bury her teen idol past.

As a result, she has become one of the most successful pop stars in the business, with annual earnings of over \$40 million.

Grande has also alerted the public to her avowed feminist mindset while removing the stereotypical association that links the term with obstructive, man-detesting, embittered females of the species.

This is the kind of in-your-face mentality that defines Ariana Grande these days, and don't expect it to go away.

 $\textbf{STRIPLV:} \ \ \text{Your evolution has happened very much in the public eye.}$

GRANDE: That's true. When I started making music, I was about 17 or 18, and I've grown a lot as a person since. I think that really started with the album "Dangerous Woman." I wanted that to prove to people the fact I was not afraid to say what I thought, that I was willing to take risks. Those risks have ended up earning good rewards, and I mean in the sense of becoming a credible artist. I'm so relieved at that – there are no guarantees in anything these days.

STRIPLV: And yes, as you say, your music now, in 2020, reflects that risk-taking. **GRANDE:** Well, I sure hope so. My music is right where my head is now. It's darker and more mature and a blend between the R&B songs and the pop stuff I've done in the past. It's only natural that as you mature, you need to explore all the feelings and experiences that have changed you and hopefully given you greater insight into things.

STRIPLV: Do you think you've evolved into the kind of artist you want to be? **GRANDE:** It's an ongoing process, but I definitely closer to who I am than was the case with my previous albums. As I've grown older, I'm much more confident about who I am, and I'm not afraid to make decisions about my music and what I want to accomplish. And yes, I wanted it to be darker and a little sexier, but the









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INTERVIEWS

main thing was being able to express myself more openly than I have before. I enjoy being provocative and sexy at times, and I want the music to convey that as well as a lot of other deeper emotions.

STRIPLV: Who have been your role models or inspirations over the years?

GRANDE: I always come back to Whitney Houston as being someone who had everything. When I did a cover of "I Will Always Love You" earlier this year, I felt a real connection to that record and to Whitney. I was born the year after that record came out, and it was a pivotal point in her career when she was truly at the top of her game, the biggest female star on the planet. The fact it went so badly wrong after that is so sad, but in a way, when someone leaves, it crystallizes the fame that they had. It's something that can never be taken away, and no one will take away the contribution she made to the music world.

STRIPLV: Her vocal range was incredible.

GRANDE: It was, and I have tried to replicate it a few times, tried.

GRANDE: It's very important to talk to young people about HIV because it's not discussed as much as it should be. Sure, there are medicines that allow people who have become infected to live longer, but there are too many people who aren't aware of the dangers and are not practicing safe sex. A lot of young people are convinced that AIDS is no longer a problem, but that's a false assumption. Around 30 million each year are affected, and for some, it is a death sentence. That's why I want to be able to use my fame to help an important cause. I'm very proud that so many of my fans have become part of the campaign against AIDS have become mini-activists. They're wonderful.

STRIPLV: Do you remember the first live concerts you went to?

GRANDE: I don't remember exactly, but my mom tells me that I went to my first Broadway show when I was two years old, which was *Beauty and the Beast*. I remember going to see Celine Dion and Shakira as a young girl. My mom wanted to educate me musically because music was a big part of our home and has always meant so much to us.

STRIPLV: You have a delicate yet intensely powerful voice.

GRANDE: That's true. I have to be careful because sometimes I get carried away, and I'll strain my voice. Many years ago, I went to a doctor who asked me if I had been doing anything strange with my voice, and that's when I figured out that I shouldn't overdo things, but I have a lot of fun doing it.

STRIPLV: How has your songwriting evolved?

GRANDE: It's something I have wanted to move forward and have done that. When you are an artist, there are so many incredible, beautiful records that get put in front of you. It can be bewildering and all too easy just to take someone else's work and run with it. I think true satisfaction as an artist comes when you have had a hand in every part of the process, and that's where I want to be, going forward. Being a producer on records was always very satisfying, but I always want to do more.

STRIPLV: Surely, a lot of that is confidence?

GRANDE: It is, and I am confident in my own ability, always. At least I am these days

STRIPLV: What do you mean?

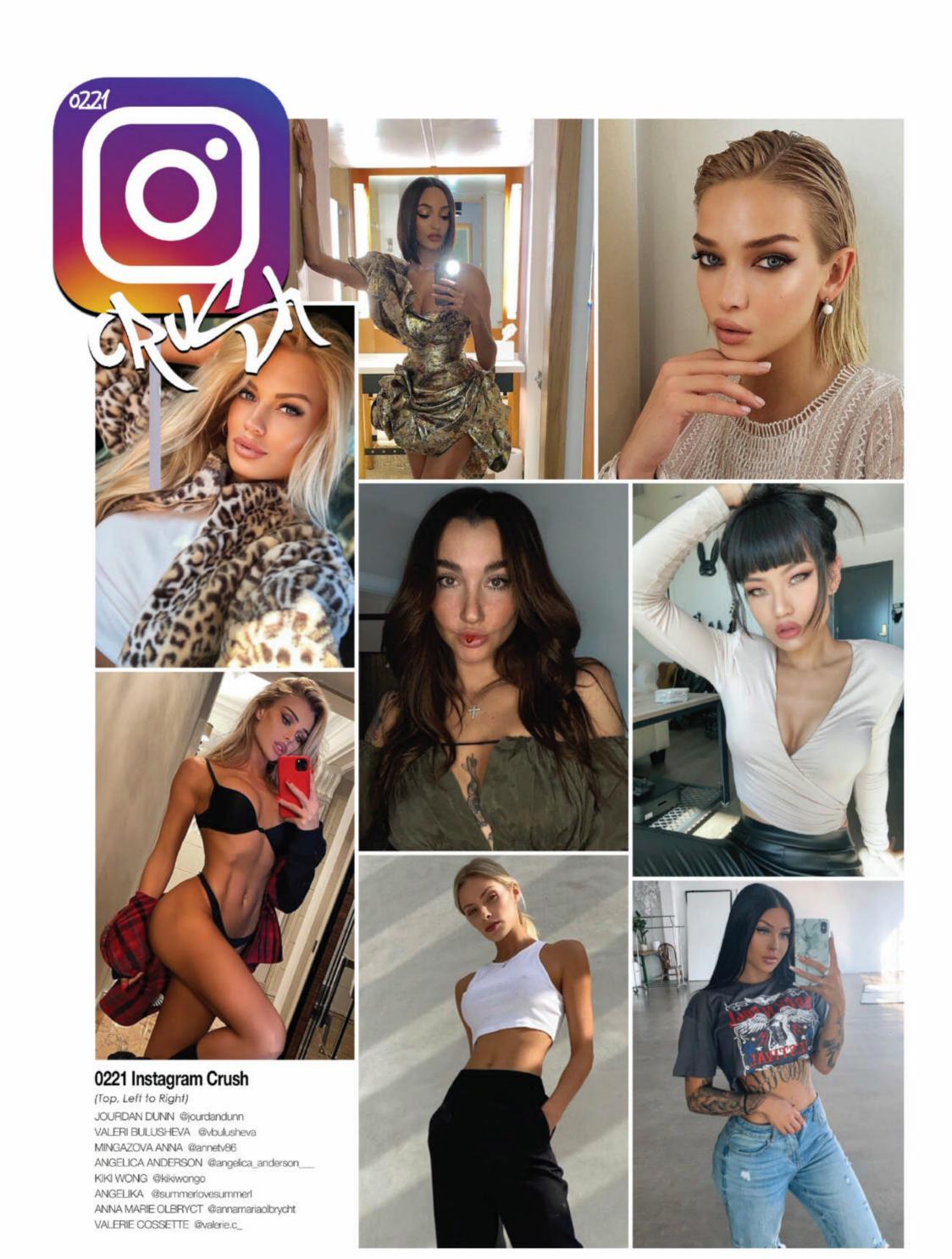
GRANDE: I think getting used to being in the spotlight is something people assume you do quite soon after becoming a recognized name, but it's actually a process that takes time. Some days I feel kinda fine; others, I am fretting over a bad review or when someone has made a comment about my private life. In the past, that change of emotions was so new to me, and I really used to struggle to come to terms with it. I would spend hours upset, paralyzed with fear. As time goes on, you learn how to put criticism into compartments. It's still there, and it still exists, but if I box it up and put that box away, then I can spend my time opening other boxes that are all about happiness, creativity, fun. That's the way I see it.

STRIPLV: You seem to have coped with lockdown well?

GRANDE: It was a great time in which I could be creative without all the usual distractions. I think sometimes you don't really just how many interruptions there are and just how much that can spoil your flow. I have come out the other side with my best work, and I'm sure a lot of other artists will be saying the same thing. The dream now is to be able to perform this work live, and we are all hoping that will happen sooner rather than later.













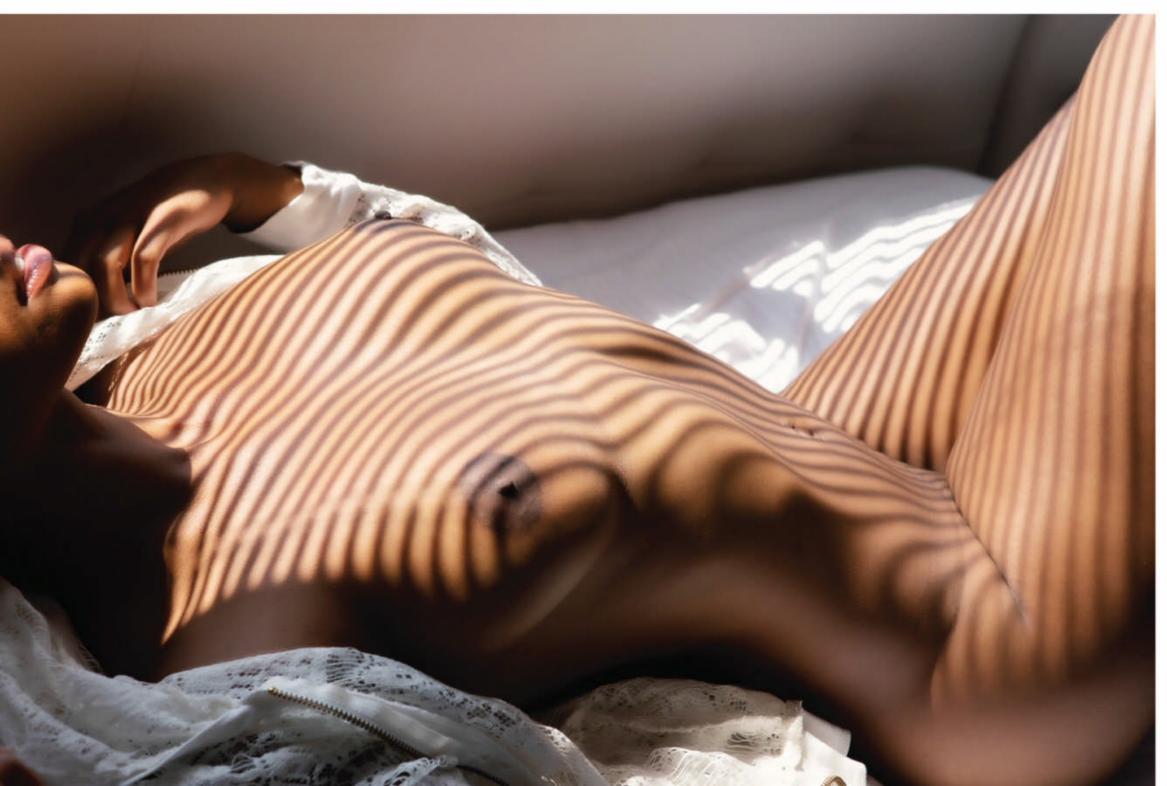




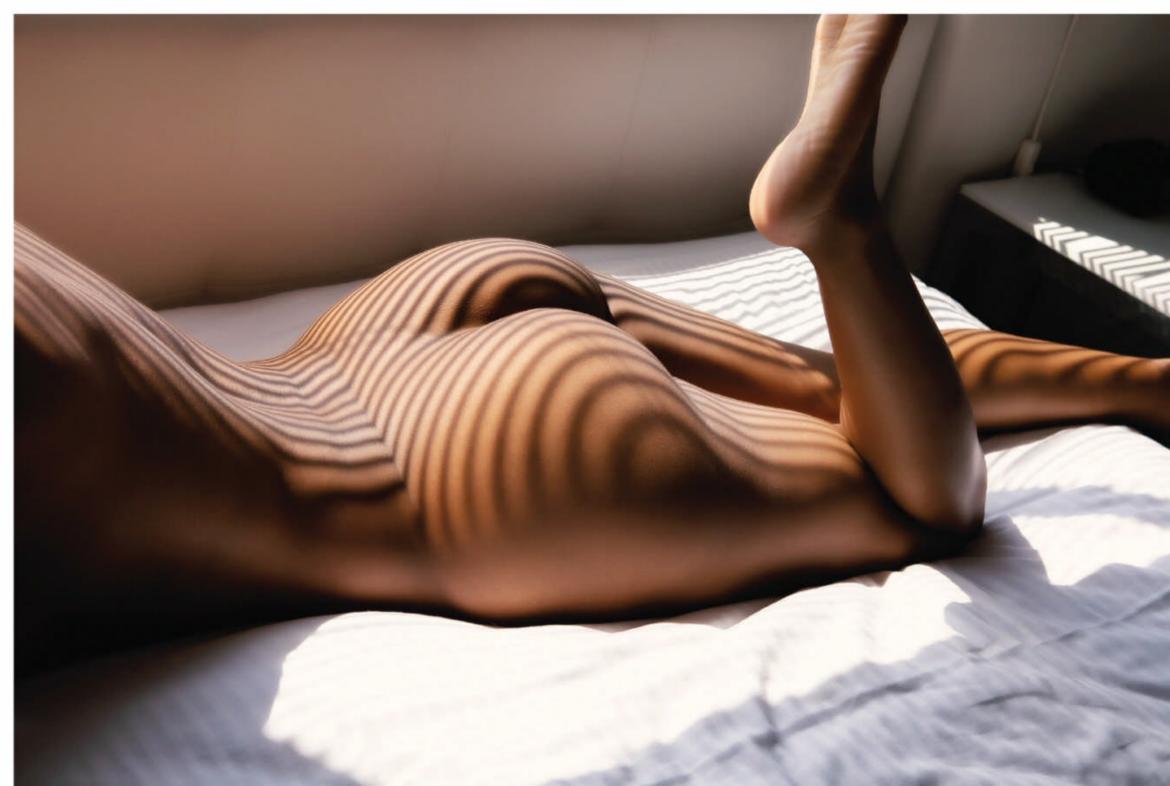




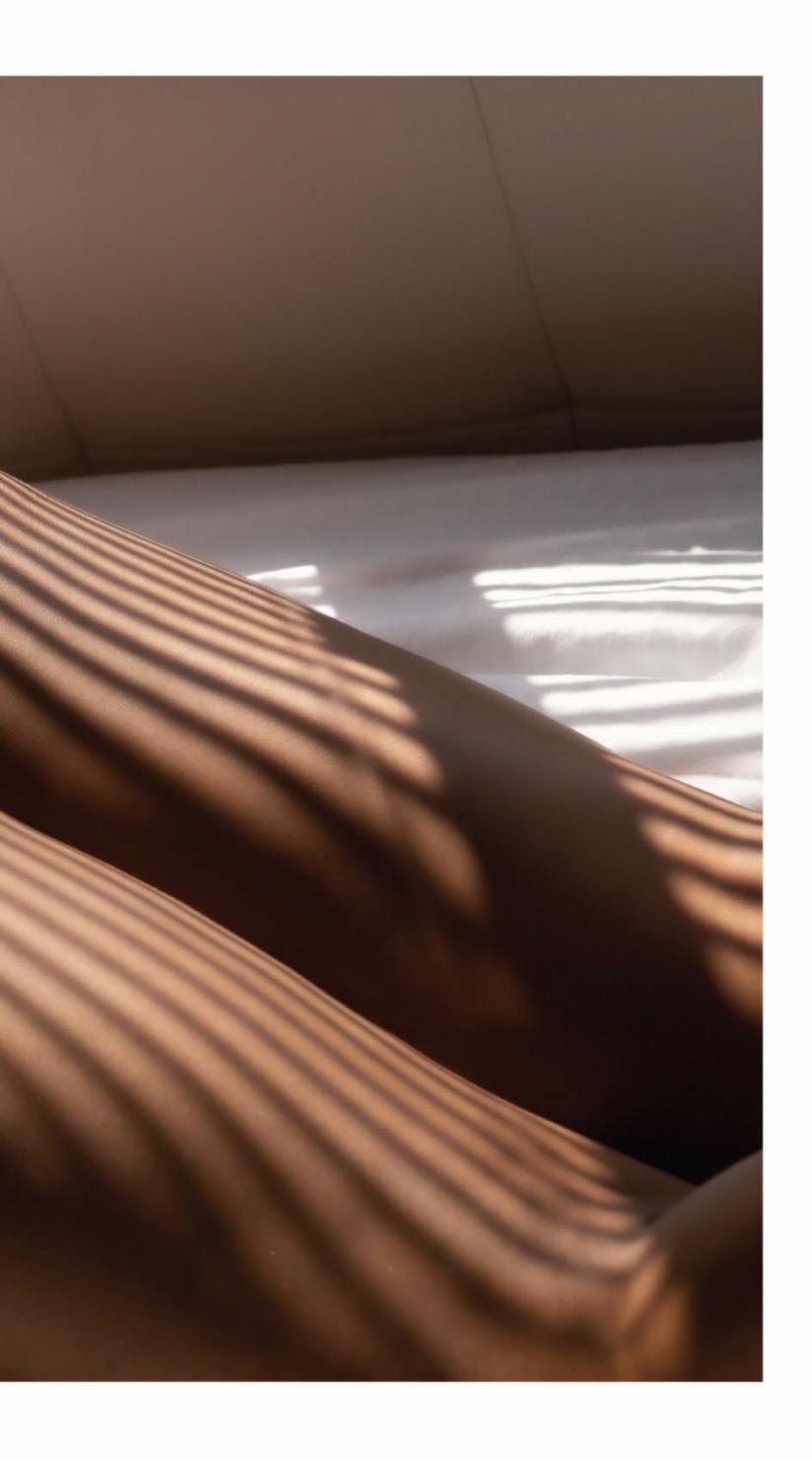




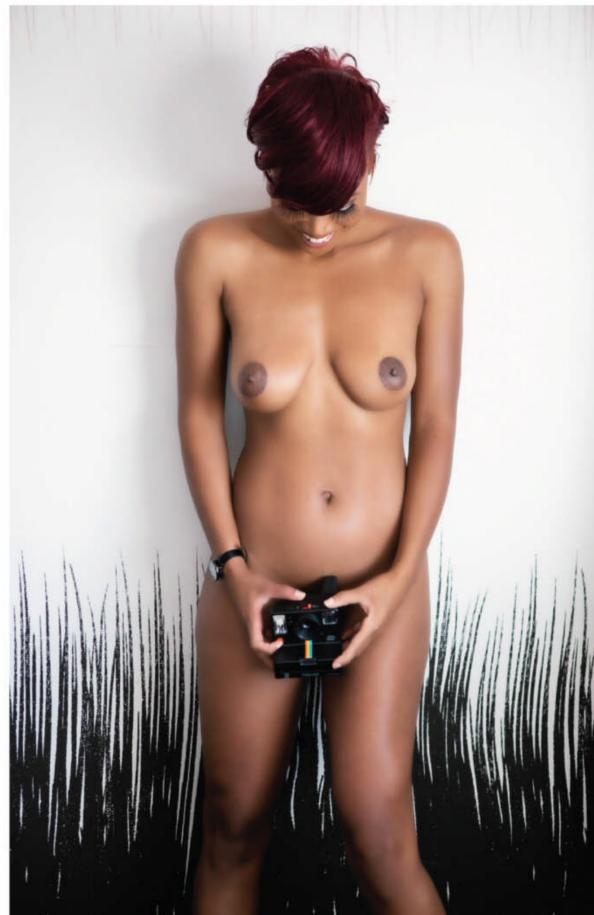


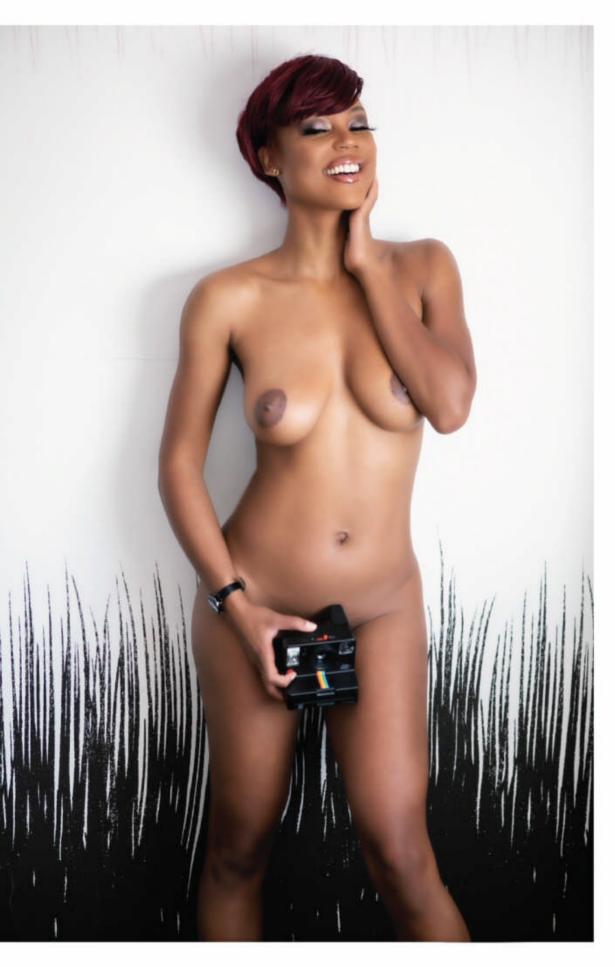


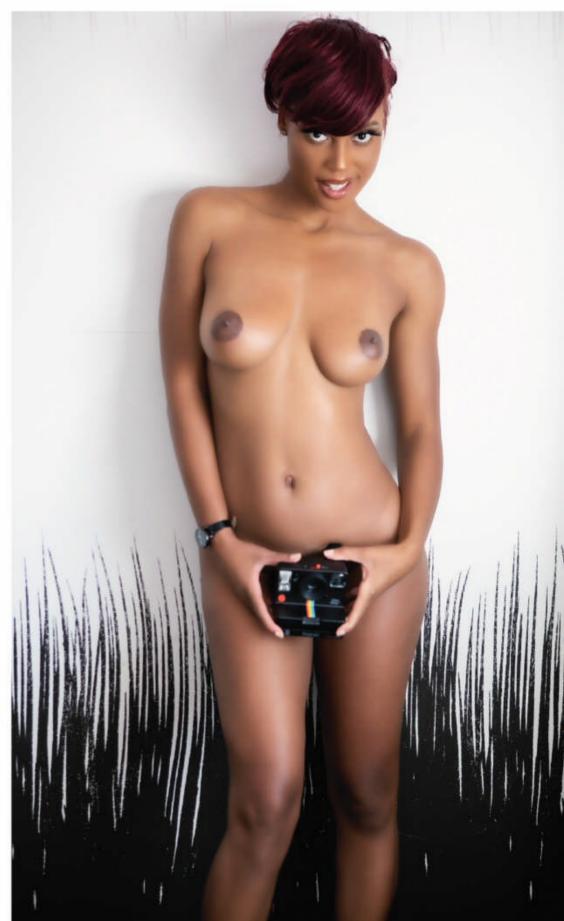








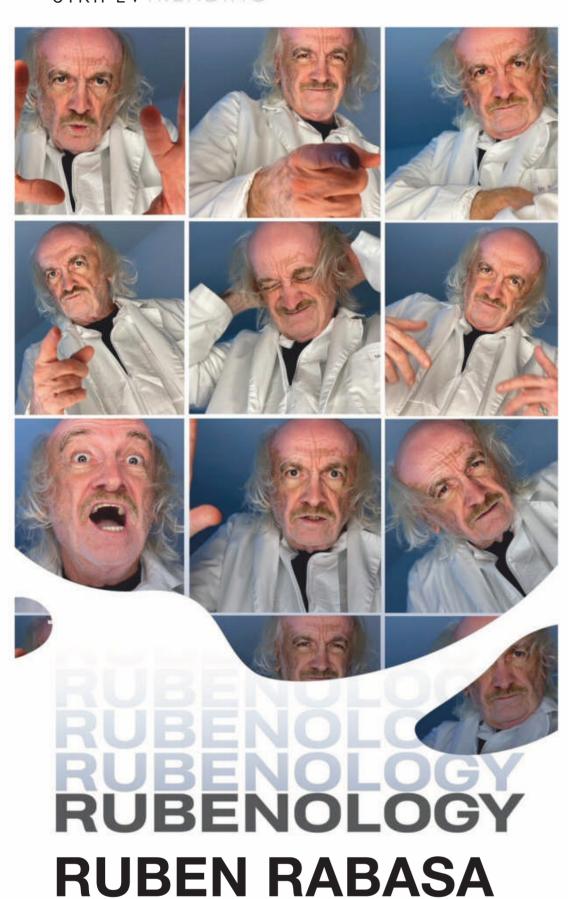








STRIPLVTRENDING



Rubenology, a gleeful personal account of actor/comedian Ruben Rabasa's memories as a young Cuban immigrant in America, presents "Waiting," the third installment of his acerbic six-episode limited series.

In the nearly 10-minute video short, Rabasa describes his first days in cold, snowy New York City at 17 and how he missed his life in sunny, tropical Havana. He took several jobs to survive, including waiting tables for many years, before finally discovering his calling as a performer.

"Lesson Numero Dos in life... if Numero Uno is to figure out where you come from, then Numero Dos is to figure out where you're going! I needed to understand that question, why was I placed on this earth? I started to study opera at Carnegie Hall, and that was the beginning of my artistic career."

Rubenology, which Rabasa co-wrote with Vanessa Garcia and directed by Victoria Collado via the production company Abre Camino Collective, brilliantly shines a light on the harsh realities of finding meaning and joy in our everyday lives, as told from the 82-year-old funnyman's unique point of view - which he calls 'Rubenisms'.

A well-known character actor of over 40 years, Rabasa became famous this past year as a popular meme, thanks to his appearance in the Netflix comedy series "I Think You Should Leave" with Tim Robinson, playing the talkative "Focus Group Man".

Rubenology airs weekly on YouTube, Instagram's IGTV and at Rubenology.com.



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Boost your wireless network speed up to 5400 Mb/s total throughput with compatible devices by installing the Nighthawk AX6 AX5400 Wireless Dual-Band Gigabit Router from Netgear. This dual-band wireless router supports the 802.11ax Wi-Fi standard and uses OFDMA technology to communicate with multiple connected devices simultaneously across the 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz bands. With the Nighthawk AX6 AX5400, you'll have the wireless bandwidth you need to stream 4K video, video chat, and play online games. Its four high-performance antennas use Beamforming to ensure strong connections and long-range, making it ideal for medium to large homes. The router also includes five Gigabit Ethernet ports, four of which connect to computers, gaming consoles, and other compatible devices. Connect an external storage drive to the available USB 3.0 Type-A port to back up and share data locally across your network. The Nighthawk AX6 AX5400 sets up quickly through the Nighthawk mobile app, and you can issue voice commands to the router through Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant. Your network is secured with wireless encryption and the Netgear Armor multi-layered cybersecurity system, which protects devices against viruses, malware, and other online threats. \$267.99, available at bhphoto.com.

VIC FIRTH SIH2 STEREO ISOLATION HEADPHONES FOR DRUMMERS

The Vic Firth SIH2 Stereo Isolation Headphones are designed to protect musicians from their instruments' high sound levels. These headphones are particularly suited to drummers in live situations. They can also be used for playing along with recorded music at safe sound levels. The headphones terminate with a 3.5mm mini-jack connector, though a 1/4" plug is also provided.

These headphones can reduce the overall noise level by up to 25 dB. Compared to the previous model—the SIH 1—these headphones feature larger, 50mm dynamic drivers that produce a more robust low end, a more precise midrange, and more transparent highs. You also get a frequency response of 20 Hz to 20 kHz. The headband has also been improved, as it is now padded. \$79.99, available at bhphoto.com.

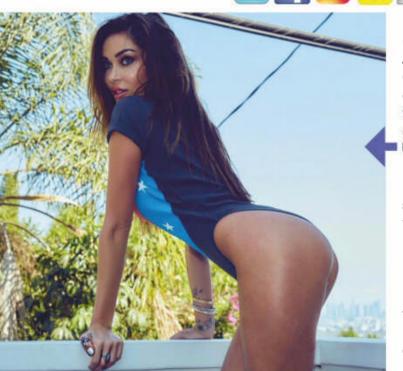
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Avid's new hybrid audio interface and production system allows you to record flawlessly through AAX DSP plug-ins in realtime and capture every performance detail with up to 32-bit/192 kHz audio conversion, double precision clocking, and transparent mic preamps. \$3,999, available at vintageking.com.





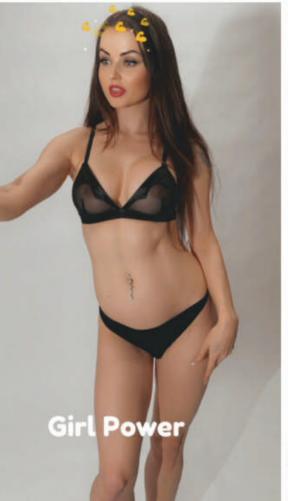
SOCIAL MEDIA E F O L W HIGHLIGHTS



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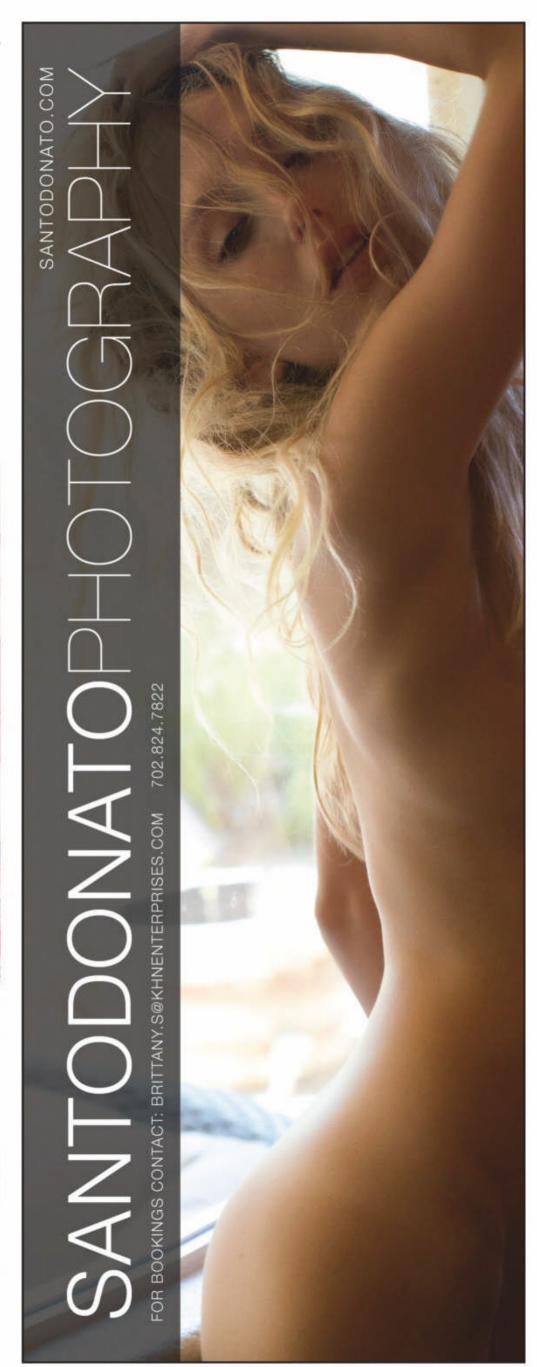








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MR. SKIN'S **TOP 10 NUDE SCENES OF 2020**

BY MRSKIN.COM

They say that hindsight is 2020, but Mr. Skin caught sight of some bare hinds-not to mention some bare frontsthat merited inclusion on his list of the best nude scenes of 2020. For the 22nd consecutive year, the foremost expert in celebrity nudity on film and television has assembled his formidable list of the best nude scenes of the year. With so many of us spending the year inside, it's not surprising that boob tube beauties dominate the list, but there's also a smattering of big-screen booties thrown in for good measure. From big names making their nude debuts to nudecomers we fell in love with at first sight, these ten actresses all stepped up to the plate and hit home runs. So get ready to take your licks as you enjoy Mr. Skin's top 10 nude scenes of 2020.

#10: Alison Brie in *Horse Girl*

It seems borderline impossible to believe that someone as hot as Alison Brie would be a so-called "Horse Girl," but she turned us all into believers with her poignant performance in this Netflix Original Film. As a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Alison did what might be her best nude scene to date and hour and eight minutes into the flick. Alison wanders out of the back room of a craft store fully naked, sporting a merkin and not much else. Hey Alison, you're merkin us crazy over here.





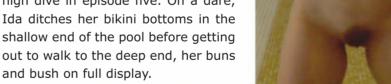
Hyperbolic titles are almost always a letdown in the end, but Elle Fanning more than lived up to the title of the series The Great by making a knockout nude debut in the first episode. Elle drops her nightgown before joining Nicholas Hoult and another woman in bed, showing off her Venus-dimpled derriere on film for the very first time. There's no denying Ms. Fanning's got one Elle of a fanny.

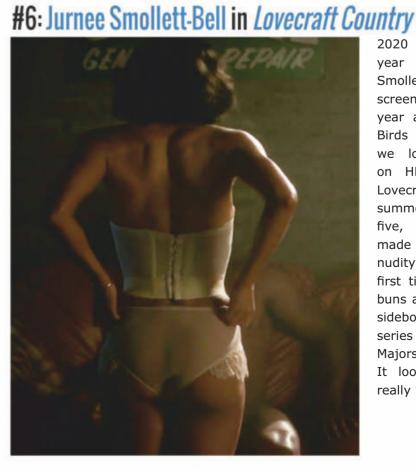
#8: Thomasin McKenzie in True History of the Kelly Gang



Easily the most surprising nude debut of 2020 belongs to New Zealand native Thomasin McKenzie in the latest film about notorious outlaw Ned Kelly. Fiftythree minutes in, the 19-year old Jojo Rabbit star changes in front of 1917's George MacKay, revealing a bountiful bubble butt just waiting to pop.

#7: Ida Engvoll in Love & Anarchy Sweden has always prided itself on producing some of the world's hottest women, and Ida Engvoll happily kept the tradition alive in the Netflix series Love & Anarchy. While she did four nude scenes in the first season, it was a no-brainer to honor her bottomless high dive in episode five. On a dare, Ida ditches her bikini bottoms in the shallow end of the pool before getting out to walk to the deep end, her buns





2020 was a massive for Jurnee vear Smollett as she lit up screens earlier this year as one of DC's Birds of Prey, but loved her turn on HBO's hit show Lovecraft Country last summer. In episode five, Ms. Smollett made the Jurnee to nudityville for the first time, baring her buns and some major sideboob while riding series star Jonathan Majors on a couch. It looks like Jurnee really Loves her Craft.



#5: Matilda De Angelis in The Undoing

Upstaging an A-List Mr. Skin Hall of Famer like Nicole Kidman is a tall order, but Italian goddess Matilda De Angelis did just that on the debut episode of HBO's The Undoing. While Nicole gets dressed in a locker room, Matilda lets it all hang out as she has a lengthy chat with her, giving us plenty of time to drink in the sight of her three beautiful Bs.

#2: Daisy Edgar-Jones in Normal People

Eye-catching Irish lass Daisy Edgar-Jones made quite a skinpression with her role on the hit Hulu series Normal People. The petite brunette did five nude scenes in the first season, but it was her fully nude selfie-taking in episode six that proved Daisy was anything but ordinary. The 22-year old Ms. Edgar-Jones takes her place in the pantheons of legendary nudecomers with a nude scene that will have you feeling as fresh as a Daisy.



#1: Kate Winslet, Saoirse Ronan in Ammonite





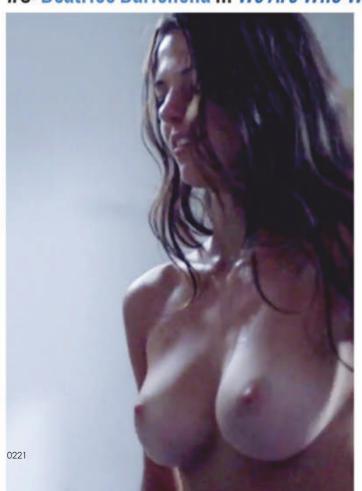
From the moment it was rumored that acclaimed actresses Winslet and Saoirse Ronan had filmed a lesbian love scene for the film Ammonite, we were sold. Little did we know just how smoking this sapphic scene would be, as the two turn this period piece into a period PIECE with one of the great cougar/kitten lesbian scenes of the new millennium. Kate bares phenomenal full frontal while Saoirse bares her buns and right breast while sitting on Kate's face.



#4: Margot Robbie in Dreamland

It seems almost impossible to believe, but it's been seven years since Margot's breakthrough nude debut in The Wolf of Wall Street and five years since she last went nude in Focus. While we hoped Margot would go nude on film again, we didn't know it would be in such epic fashion. An hour and eighteen minutes into the Depression-era adventure, we get two full minutes of Margot's mams as she showers with co-star Finn Cole. Margot will make you wanna Robbie one out.

#3: Beatrice Barichella in We Are Who We Are



We Are Who We Are was a new series from the director of Call Me By Your Name, so we expected plenty of bare beauties in beautiful locales. What we didn't expect was to be blown away by nudecomer Beatrice Barichella, who Bareichellas her body in the fourth episode of the HBO series.







hat is it that makes you, YOU? This Christmas day, Pixar Animation Studios' released the feature film Soul. Joe Gardner (voice of Jamie Foxx) a middle-school band teacher who gets the chance of a lifetime to play at the best jazz club in town. But one small misstep takes him from the streets of New York City to The Great Before – a fantastical place where new souls get their personalities, quirks and interests before they go to Earth. Determined to return to his life, Joe teams up with a precocious soul, 22 (voice of Tina Fey), who has never understood the appeal of the human experience. As Joe desperately tries to show 22 what's great about living, he may just discover the answers to some of life's most important questions. Directed by Academy Award® winner Pete Docter (Inside Out, Up), co-directed by Kemp Powers (One Night in Miami) and produced by Academy Award nominee Dana Murray, p.g.a. (Pixar short *Lou*), Disney and Pixar's Soul can be streamed directly on Disney+. STRIPLV sat down with Foxx to discuss the new movie and his work on the Netflix series "Project Power."

STRIPLV: How would you describe the story of *Soul*?

FOXX: How would I describe the story of Soul? The story of Soul is an animated journey of Joe Gardner, who is an ex-jazz musician who has turned into a middle school music teacher whose dream is still burning his passion is still burning that one day he will have that opportunity to become an incredible jazz musician. When he gets the opportunity, things go a little array. In Disney and Pixar fashion, we go on a journey of finding out where souls come from. And when you think about it, soul is in everything in our life. Who is your soulmate? Soul Food, "Soul Train," but this is that wonderful journey of finding out the origin of the soul. He is happily stuck in a job where he is teaching jazz, sort of a throwback as a trade as a musician. He is teaching jazz to these little kids at school. And, he still has hopes and dreams of finally becoming that great jazz musician. There is this big gig coming up, and he wants to go play for it. He finally goes and auditions. He gets lost, and for musicians or anybody out there, when you get lost in your trade, he is just in it doing his thing no nerves. He just went for it. And, they said wow, you are great you will have the gig finally your life will be right. And he runs out the door like everything is great, and as soon as he runs out the door, he falls into a manhole, and his whole life and afterlife changes.

STRIPLV: Tell us about Tina Fey's character 22.

FOXX: 22 is what I would say for the lack of a better word is cynical but doesn't really like to see a reason to enjoy this Earth thing. And, so she is a person that needs to be convinced. She's been stuck in this delightful limbo for a while and hasn't met the right person to tell her the right things to help her understand how life on earth could be. She's a tough cookie played by Tina Fey. You've got the talented Tina Fey who is just, you know, come on. Her mind and the way she works is just amazing. Plus, she is a writer. She started out as a writer on "Saturday Night Live." So just to be able to go back and forth even if we weren't in the same room as each other. We were only in the same room a couple of times but just to be in her presence elevated it.

STRIPLV: Why did you want to take part in this project?

FOXX: I wanted to take part in this project because my daughter, who is twelve now but ten at the time, was like Dad, you are going to be in Pixar films? And, I was like yeah, and then she says you finally made it. You are finally famous. And I was like, what about all this other stuff I've done? And she was like, nah, this is it. She was right because being in a Disney Pixar film is something that, as an actor, you are just like, wow, I hope I get the opportunity to be in something like that. And be in something that is absolutely great, and also an added tidbit, which is something that is so fantastic to be one of the first African American lead in a Pixar

film. I mean, that is really high grass that's a high mark. So, that among a lot of other artistic, beautiful things is why I wanted to be a part of this film.

STRIPLV: You may have already touched on this, but who is Joe Gardner, and what is his passion?

FOXX: Joe Gardner is a jazz musician in New York City and whose passion runs high when it comes to his music, but he is a teacher, an educator, he has a music school, and he is teaching kids the power of music and the importance of jazz. And, while doing that, he is still pursuing his passion, and when he finally gets that opportunity to capitalize on his artistic wares, something magical happens.

STRIPLV: How do you personally relate to Joe?

FOXX: How do I personally relate to Joe? How do I personally relate to Joe Gardner? I am a dreamer. I constantly dream. I love daydreaming about what I can still become, and even though I've had some success in this business that we are in. I am still an artist I still dream about finding that next song, finding that next joke, finding that next movie or TV opportunity, to wow and impress, whether it be my fans or my peers.

STRIPLV: Describe the relationship of Joe between him and soul 22.

FOXX: The relationship between Joe and the new soul 22 was almost mirroring what he was doing back on earth. He was teaching kids a reason to live, a reason to play music, and a reason to have joy. So, that's what he took; his special skill set was not just his music but his ability to empower. That's what he is doing with 22 empowering 22, giving 22 the power to understand that life is worth living.

STRIPLV: Describe working with director Pete Doctor, co-director Kemp Powers, and producer Dana Murray in creating this film.

FOXX: The process of working with Kemp Powers, Dana Murray and Pete Doctor on this film was amazing. First of all, I came in a little nervous, and I came in hot. I came in trying to do all these facial expressions like ho-hum he ho haha. And they were like, Jamie, we appreciate that, but we are not going to see you. We just have to have your voice. And Kemp was like, "Hey man, I dig that, but let's hear the voice." So, it was this incredible collective of artistic expression of what we were trying to and finding the animation voice to go with these wonderful characters. You know what was great about them? It was the way they complimented each other. As we were going through the script, they were like, try this and try that. There was no like it has to be this way. It was very complimentary. They had a great hold on everything. And you know, it was quite a thing to get this thing animated. And Dana and just everybody all chipped in to make sure that we would achieve magic. And that we did.

STRIPLV: Did the story of this film affect how you receive life's little gifts?

FOXX: Did the story affect me on how I receive life's little gifts? Yes, it did. I was always a glass half full type guy, but this filled mine to the brim with optimism. And I was also enjoying the moment. I would always say, "Don't waste your blink." Where I come from, they say life is a blink of the eye. So, I just say don't waste your blink this just empowers that phrase. Walking away from this film, you will be charged up and come away with fun emotions. And also, your mind will be thinking, yo I am gonna get up the next day and go for it.

STRIPLV: Soul celebrates jazz music and may introduce it to a new generation. What does that mean to you personally?

FOXX: The music in Soul is jazz. Will that affect the young generation? I am hoping it will because jazz is something that is in the DNA of all music. It is artistic freedom, your expression of what you feel musically. If you think about 90's hip hop, it is all layered with jazz. For kids to get a huge dose of jazz, I think that is just going to make the world sweeter.

STRIPLV: What was it like working with Pixar?

FOXX: Man, you know it's the amazing, incredible Disney Pixar when you think of all the films before this one. The way they are able to think the way they four or five or six dimensional. What they did with these types of subject matter, it really opens up your head.

STRIPLV: What makes *Soul* special?

FOXX: What makes *Soul* special is Disney Pixar's Kemp Powers, Dana Murray, and Pete Doctor. They live in a hierarchy of animation. And when they tackle these incredible and when they put their minds together and tackle these topics, they





are able to achieve magic. And what is special about Soul, in particular, is the time that we are in. We are in a challenging time when it comes to humanity. Our joy is very important, and I think that this beautiful gift that Disney Pixar gave us will allow us to hold on to that and reach for the joy in all of us because it is so desperately needed.

STRIPLV: So let's change gears entirely and talk about "Project Power."

FOXX: The drug is called power. It's on the street, so that's the part that you can actually understand, but the fact that it has this supernatural quality to it and a great question when you are like promoting is if you had a chance have any superhero power for just five minutes what that super-power would be?

STRIPLV: You give a lot of life advice to Robin in this movie. What do you hope people will be inspired by when they watch "Project Power?"

FOXX: You know what I think? At this time, they just get inspired to watch, escape, and have a good time. You've got young actors like Dominque Fishback that blow everybody away. And just have a good time. There are a couple of life lessons in there, like the power is always with you. The fact that the power when it is misused it can get weird. I just hope that you enjoy it. It also features Joseph Gordon Levitt and Machine Gun Kelly. Just enjoy, get your popcorn. I bought a popcorn popper for this specifically. I got the one like at that movie theaters.

STRIPLV: That's essential (laughing)

FOXX: Yeah, I turn the lights down in my home just so I can go. (Squinting like he is looking for his seat at the theater).

STRIPLV: What power would you want if the power pill existed, and what ability do you currently have?

FOXX: The power of love. I would be love man to spread all the love to everyone. That's my symbol (making a heart shape on his chest) right there. Love man, love man, where are you, love man. You have to sing that in order for me to come. I already possess some of those attributes. It's all about love.

STRIPLV: What was it like working with the directors?

FOXX: The youth of them and the things you wanted to do. You know, when you are working with young directors on their first couple of movies, they are hungry. And these guys were hungry. They were up against a huge challenge. This was a big undertaking, and just to see the light that they had in their eyes. The passion of even if we had to stay on one scene for two or three hours, they did not let up. They didn't sacrifice their art for their time schedule. They said they were going to get what they needed. I think what they did is just fantastic because they turned in a great project. I am looking forward to working with them again; their future

STRIPLV: What was it like working with Joseph Gordon Levitt?

he was six years old. When I told people I was working with him, it's the stamp of professional approval. The movies that he's been in and have done, it's just his look, and then to be on the set with him to be in that police car. There was this one cool thing to let you know how great our business can be. Also, how personal it can be. I know that he hadn't worked on purpose for a while taking care of his kids and things. He looked over to me, and he said: "Man, I haven't been on a set in a long time, and I just have to tell you I am having a great time and I am happy for this." I am an emotional dude, that hit me right in my tear box. I was like, you know what? I am glad you are here to dawg. Those are what you call the good guys. He is definitely the good guy.



RODRIGO SANTORO THE BRAZILIAN



orld-renowned actor Rodrigo Santoro can recently be seen starring alongside Academy Award Winner Anthony Hopkins, Evan Rachel Wood, and Geoffrey Wright in the hit HBO series "Westworld" created by Jonah Nolan and produced by JJ Abrams. Rodrigo starred as the male lead in the Hulu series "Reprisal" for producer Warren Littlefield. He also stars in the feature "Project Power" on Netflix, opposite Jamie Foxx and Joseph Gordon Levitt. He will soon be seen in the Netflix foreign language film Seven Slaves for director Alex Moratto. In 2018, he appeared at Sundance for a movie he starred in and produced to critical acclaim titled *Un Traductor*. His extensive list of credits includes a lead role opposite Benicio Del Toro in Steven Soderbergh's Che, a lead role in the iconic film Love Actually, Focus opposite Will Smith and Margot Robbie, 300: Rise of an Empire opposite Eva Green, Rio 2, The Last Stand opposite Forrest Whitaker, What to expect when you're expecting opposite Cameron Diaz and Jennifer Lopez, Hemingway and Gelhorn for HBO opposite Nicole Kidman, *The 33* opposite Juliette Binoche about the Chilean minors, Jane Got a Gun opposite Natalie Portman and the Brazilian film *Heleno*, chronicling the true-life story of the most notorious and successful Brazilian soccer player, Heleno de Frietas. STRIPLV sat down with Santoro for a quick interview, and this is what transpired.

STRIPLV: Tell me a little bit about your character Biggie in "Project Power" and what you brought to this role.

SANTORO: Well, Biggie is a salesman, the main representative of power. I would say he is a visionary. He is very confident in his vision. He wants to take the product all over the world. Very confident, smooth salesman, but underneath that character that he built for himself to seduce people, I think he is a very secure person. It's a character that, since the beginning, I've tried to humanize him. I think that villains are interesting to play but also very tricky because it's hard to humanize them because the audience right away they just don't like them. They say this is a bad guy. I don't like him. My job and my challenge as an actor is to try to at least make people understand who he is, it's a person, not a villain, not a bad guy or a good guy, and it was interesting to take that journey with Biggie also his transformation is something very exciting and stimulating for me it's a process that I have went through before but not as intense this time. I've learned a lot with this experience.

STRIPLV: What do you think sets this story aside from other stories about superpowers?

SANTORO: I think it is a very fresh approach to super-powers. It's not a superhero movie. It is about regular people that have a chance to have a super-power for five minutes after they take a pill. But the pill is very dangerous to you. It can do harm. It can kill you. This is very interesting, and the idea of playing with super-powers but not exactly talking about superheroes is just interesting material to play with. Especially nowadays in the world we are living in. I think that there is a very clear metaphor in the title of the movie. It is called "Project Power." We are clearly talking about our need for power as human beings. How far do we go? To have power what we are capable of doing and questioning all of that.

STRIPLV: I understand that you had to wear some very interesting prosthetics to do this film. Without going into too much detail, can you tell me more about that? **SANTORO:** Biggie goes through a very intense transformation throughout the film. Physical transformation. I had a very long makeup session. I think it was about nine hours. I had the pleasure and the luck to work with an amazing makeup

artist whose name is Mike Marino, and he really did an amazing job. So, the interesting thing about this film is that there is very little CGI everything is shot in a practical way. That is the style of the directors. One of the things that were interesting to me to exercise, to be focused, to be working on my concentration. Because it was so many hours in that makeup chair getting ready, and then I had to incorporate the prosthetics into the external and become one thing. It was a great experience. I would say that I have never done anything like that before.

SANTORO: Those boys, they are the best. I remember the very first call that I had with them after I had read the script. We got on the phone via Skype. I just liked them right away. We started to talk about the movie, and the first thing they said was, "What do you have to say about this character?" Do you any ideas any suggestions? And I'm like, I like these guys. They were already open like that, you know? They wanted to collaborate, and it's great to be able to work like that. I truly believe in collaboration and the reason the movie turned out so great, and I am really proud of it. The reason was the way it was done. The atmosphere on set was so relaxed on set. It was such a great environment and a lot of improvising. It was a very creative environment. That is what we as artists need, and when we get an environment like that, it shows. At the end of the day, you see it, the result. It becomes that something you can tell, and I think that's what this was.

SANTORO: I've been a fan of Jamie and Joseph for a long time. But you never know when you meet them how it is going to be. I try not to create any expectations. It was a happy surprise because they were so down to earth. Accessible and both of them. Jamie is just very intelligent. He is very smart. He's quick. He is able to talk about anything. And he wants to make sure that everyone is ok, and everybody is having a good time. He would play songs for us on set. He would talk about so many different things. I loved it. I had a great time. Joseph, too. I had good conversations with Joseph too on set and in between takes. Really such a sweet guy, very talented, and very generous. Joseph was always there, just trying to feed you as an actor in the scene to help you. It was a true collaboration; I had a great time with both of them.



























WILL MMA EVER FORCE BOXING TO TAP OUT?

In late 1993, with Mike Tyson serving time behind bars for the convicted rape of an 18-year-old Miss Black Rhode Island contestant in an Indianapolis hotel room, professional boxing was dominated by such fighters as Riddick Bowe, Julio César Chávez, Evander Holyfield, Roy Jones Jr., Lennox Lewis, and Pernell Whitaker.

Meanwhile, as these pugilists from various weight divisions within "the sweet science" were fighting for newspaper headlines, a new phrase in combat sports had made its way into print as *Los Angeles Times* critic Howard Rosenberg coined it. In a November 15th review of the very first Ultimate Fighting Championship card – which took place three days earlier at the McNichols Sports Arena in Denver, Colorado – the term Mixed Martial Arts appeared for the first time anywhere.

Although the various disciplines that comprised MMA all had their own tournaments and championships at the time, they didn't quite receive the global attention or notoriety until they were all put in one pot and stirred together. Spectators were curious to see who was better: wrestlers, grapplers, jiu-jitsu combatants, karate experts, kung-fu masters, kickboxers, etc. The fans of each discipline rooted for their sport to prevail but started to appreciate the other forms of combat.

It's no secret that a large part of the appeal for that first UFC card was not only in the fact that these contests would be bare-knuckled, but that the event itself was promoted with the tagline "There are no rules."

While UFC 1 did not have the strict guidelines the organization follows today, it operated with limited rules. For instance, while it banned eye-gouging, groin strikes and biting, it did allow some techniques you would probably see in a bar fight as opposed to an organized competition. Head-butting, hair pulling and fish-hooking were all allowed. There were other guidelines that pretty much enabled anyone who wanted to compete to step onto the canvas. No substance screening, no judge scorecards, no time limits to the fights, and matches could only be stopped by knockout, tapout, or corner stoppage (indicated by a towel being thrown in). Even the referee couldn't stop a match – he could only do so if a fighter's corner instructed him to.

On top of all that, there was the allure of something called the Octagon, an eight-sided cage with a chain-link fence instead of a traditional four-sided ring with ropes. The Octagon was the brainchild of Hollywood veteran John Milius who was perhaps best known for directing "Conan the Barbarian," a Brazilian jiu-jitsu student of Rorion Gracie.

While boxing promoters universally abhorred and criticized the event, calling it savagely cruel, exceedingly brutal, primitive and unsophisticated – one step above the local amateur tough man contests that were common in those days – the 90,000 pay-per-view (PPV) buys and promise of a videotape aftermarket at such outlets as Blockbuster, Hollywood Video and West Coast Video, guaranteed that Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG), the owners of UFC, would present future events.

As time marched on, and despite the undercurrent of change underway thanks to the rise of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, karate and judo studios appearing because of the increased popularity of MMA, pro boxing continued to dominate the combat sport landscape because of its solid global infrastructure of local gyms, amateur clubs, YMCA tie-ins, and Olympic-inspired organizations, all of which trained these athletes and put them on a path to earn money in the pro ranks after their amateur boxing days were done.

While many boxers transitioned from amateur to pro, the vast majority did not, and that started contributing to the decline. However, some industry insiders believed the decline in popularity took place nearly ten years earlier when on November 18, 1982, at the age of 27, South Korean boxer Kim Duk-koo died after fighting in a world championship boxing match against Ray Mancini in Las Vegas. Heightened by the bout being televised live in the U.S. on CBS-TV and compounded by the fact that a week after the fight *Sports Illustrated* published a photo of the battle on its cover under the heading "Tragedy in the Ring," his death sparked reforms aimed at better protecting the health of fighters, including prefight checkups, such as electrocardiograms, brain tests, and lung tests as opposed to just blood pressure and heartbeat checks, and reducing the number of rounds in championship bouts from 15 to 12.

According to a December 12, 1982 article in the New York Times by writer Michael

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Katz titled "Referee Defends His Decision," retrieved November 5, 2020, the Nevada State Athletic Commission proposed a series of rule changes as a result of Duk-koo's death, announcing it before a December 10 match between Michael Dokes and Mike Weaver that would in itself be disputed because of what officials were informed before the fight. The break between rounds was initially proposed to go from 60 to 90 seconds (but it was later rescinded). The standing eight count – which allows a knockdown to be called even if the boxer is not down but on the verge of being knocked down – was imposed, and new rules regarding the suspension of a boxer's license was put into effect (45 days after a knockout loss).

Also, according to a November 13, 2007 article on *espn.com* by writer Ron Borges titled "Twenty-five years is a long time to carry a memory," retrieved November 5, 2020, while the WBC wasn't the fight's sanctioning organization, they were the first to act to protect boxers. During their 1983 annual convention, they announced that rules concerning a boxer's pre-fight medical care needed to be changed, and they also reduced the number of rounds for title fights from 15 to 12. Four years later, the WBA and IBF would follow suit, and by the time the WBO was formed in 1988, 12 rounds were the norm.

But perhaps the most significant blow to professional boxing came just thirteen days after the match that took Duk-koo's life eight days earlier when one of the sports' most prominent advocates, Howard Cosell of ABC Sports – having just witnessed a horrible mismatch between then world heavyweight champion Larry Holmes and Randall "Tex" Cobb – turned on the professional boxing establishment and called for an end to the sport.





Here was a guy who was a broadcasting icon due to his gig on Monday Night Football and who was considered at the time to be one of the world's top boxing journalists thanks to his longtime association and friendship with Muhammad Ali, delivering one of the most public criticisms the business has ever known. But it wasn't Cosell's first call for action.

Ten years earlier, Cosell testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee that boxing should be placed under Federal control because the organizations that regulated boxing were too lax in their oversight and easily manipulated by outside sources including the promoters of the day, most notably Don King and Bob Arum. With nothing being done in the ten years between the testimony and the Holmes-Cobb fight, Cosell grew bitter and thought it a bad joke when critics would contend that boxing could be made better from within.

Dave Kindred, a columnist for The Washington Post at the time, quoted Cosell after the Holmes-Cobb fight as saying in a telephone interview he was

"deeply troubled by boxing" and that he was walking away from the sport.

"Nothing ever changes," Cosell told Kindred. "I've done all I can. We've seen the thumbless glove, we've seen Earnie Shavers and Ray Leonard hurt their eyes, I've seen Benny Paret and Willie Classen and Cleveland Denny and Duk Koo Kim (sic) die."

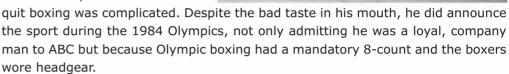
Paret passed away on March 24, 1962, ten days after his welterweight title defense against Emile Griffith from injuries sustained in the bout. Classen succumbed on November 28, 1979, five days after absorbing several brutal shots at the hands of Wilford Scypion. Denny died on July 7, 1980, 17 days after his Canadian

heavyweight title loss to Gaetan Hart, where he took multiple blows to the head.

"Yet we still have laissez-faire," Cosell said. "You've got two championships. The networks must take some responsibility for that. You've got sleazy promoters. You've got reporters who are afraid to look at boxing. I've had it. No more."

Reflecting on his 1972 Senate subcommittee testimony, Cosell told Kindred, "I could see where Don King and Bob Arum were recreating the control that the courts had ruled illegal years before. But I stayed with boxing because I loved the boxers."

As things often were with Cosell at the time, his "decision" to



Still, the sting from Cosell's attempted knockout lasted and by the time the 1990s rolled around boxing was pretty much off network television and relegated to cable, particularly HBO and Showtime.

While Cosell passed away in 1995, perhaps no other sight illustrated his concerns for pro boxers more than that of a shaking Muhammad Ali lighting the Olympic flame during the opening ceremony of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. Twelve years earlier, Ali was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, resulting from head trauma from violent physical activities such as boxing. Many attributed Ali's condition to his time as an active fighter.

While both HBO and Showtime delivered quality contests, without Mike Tyson, "Sugar Ray" Leonard, Roberto Duran and many of the other fighters who made the 1980s in many ways one of the most competitive decades for boxing, except for Hector "Macho" Camacho, Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather Jr., and Manny Pacquiao, there seemed to be severe a lack of charismatic competitors. As such, there was no media darling for the press to latch onto and give exposure. That especially held true for the heavyweight division, which from 1996 to the mid-2010s was dominated by Ukrainian brothers Wladimir and Vitaly Klitschko.

MMA, meanwhile, and specifically UFC, started dominating combat sports PPV buys. Instead of the pro boxers getting the attention, the media began focusing on these modern-day gladiators who entered an 8-sided cage. Although it was much more violent and brutal than boxing was, the spectacle drew attention, and so the combatants started to become well known. UFC showcased a multitude of combat styles and fighters, including Tank Abbott, Don Frye, Gary Goodridge, Gerard Gordeau, Royce Gracie, Marco Ruas, Dan "The Beast" Severn, Ken Shamrock, Patrick Smith, and Oleg Taktarov.

The only problem for UFC was, the more popular it became with the fans, the more of an outcry there was from politicians to ban it. After seeing a videotape of one of the first UFC events, Republican Senator John McCain from Arizona called for the immediate banning of MMA, referring to it as "human cockfight" and subsequently sending letters to the governors of all 50 states. One-by-one states began declining UFC's request for sanctioning – thirty-six states in all passed laws banning "no-holds-barred" fighting, including New York, which enacted the ban on the eve of UFC 12, forcing an overnight relocation of the event to Dothan, Alabama. By 1997 the group was forced "underground" as they held events in small markets.

In response to the harsh criticism, UFC began cooperating with state athletic commissions and rewrote their rules to remove elements of fights considered barbaric while keeping the core elements of striking and grappling. UFC 12 saw the introduction of weight classes and the banning of fish-hooking. For UFC 14, gloves became mandatory, while kicks to the head of a downed opponent were

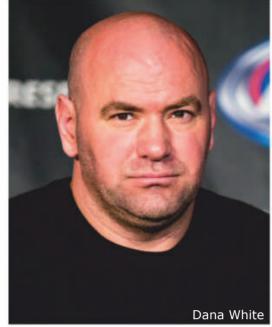


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banned. UFC 15 saw limitations on hair pulling and the banning of strikes to the back of the neck and head, headbutting, small-joint manipulations, and groin strikes. With five-minute rounds introduced at UFC 21, the company gradually rebranded as a more palatable form of combat sports, positioning itself as a sport rather than a spectacle.

After a long and arduous fight to receive sanctioning, SEG was nearly bankrupt and was unable to produce PPV events. That's when brothers Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta, two Station Casinos executives, along with business partner Dana White, entered the picture. In December 2000, they tendered an offer to buy UFC, and a month later, the Fertittas owned the brand, having paid \$2 million. Zuffa, LLC was created as the parent company that would control UFC.



Having ties with the Nevada State Athletic Commission (Lorenzo was a former NSAC member), Zuffa was able to get UFC sanctioned in Nevada. Shortly after that, they returned to PPV. Under Zuffa's ownership and White's guidance, UFC slowly rose in mainstream popularity due to more exposure through better advertising, corporate sponsorships, returning to PPV, and distributing home video and DVD releases.

By 2006, UFC dominated pro boxing in the Las Vegas publicity department and looked at the WBA, WBC, WBO and IBF in its rearview mirror. While

boxing still had a presence in Sin City, you had to look for it. That lack of exposure impacted the industry, so much so that during a 2009 interview on Ariel Helwani's MMA Show, Top Rank's Bob Arum called UFC fighters "guys rolling around like homosexuals" generalized MMA as "garbage and junk." Arum also found fit to knock UFC's fan base.

"For me, I look at the UFC audience and the boxing audience as being two different audiences entirely," he said. "UFC (fans) are a bunch of skinhead white guys watching people in the ring who are also looking like skinhead white guys. For me, and people like me, (MMA) is not something that they ever care to see. They watched it. It's horrible."

Arum continued by saying MMA was not a sport that showed great talent. He said, "Guys who throw punches can't throw a punch to save their ass. When the punches land, the guys have no chance. These are not like boxers. They are not trained like boxers."

Two years later, Arum was on the attack again. In 2011 Arum shrugged off/joked his way through comments about the UFC's then upcoming debut on Fox, where they'd go head-to-head against the first hour of a Top Rank PPV card headlined by Manny Pacquiao. When they talked about the different business models, about the way the two sports are promoted, and about their crossover – or lack thereof – and how that impacts the two sports, Arum said he didn't care about UFC and wasn't worried about them.

That was enough to trigger a volatile, if not hostile response from Dana White. Speaking to Kevin Iole of Yahoo! Sports, White went for Top Rank's jugular: "Bob Arum is a jealous moron," he said. "Bob Arum could do great things for the sport of boxing. I don't know if he wasn't smart enough to do what we did or whatever, but when we first came out with this thing, this guy laughed at us. He said how stupid the Fertittas were and that this thing was ridiculous and it would never be a sport."

"Now, all he does is run around [expletive] and complaining about it," White continued. "You had the ability, Bob Arum, to make boxing great. But the problem was, you were greedy. You're a greedy pig, just like all the other guys who were involved in boxing. All you ever did was try to rip money out of it. You never invested a dime into the sport of boxing to make it great, to make it last, to create a future for boxing. He's nothing but a greedy pig, and his jealousy shows non-stop."

While Arum and White were busy trading barbs, even the flamboyant boxing promoter Don King recognized MMA's success, and while he never made it official, in 2011 had contemplated getting into the MMA game himself.

"MMA is great. I love MMA," he told Mike Berardino of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. "Many other guys think it's bad, but I think it brings in people young and old."

Although King called MMA "an outright Pier 6 brawl" and referred to it as "sophisticated barbarism," he recognized UFC's ability to promote.

"UFC is doing a much better job in advertising and promoting their [events] than the guys that are out here [in boxing]," King said. "The young kids want to see action, and UFC is exciting. That's where the knockout punch comes in boxing."

That was as far as King would compare the two sports.

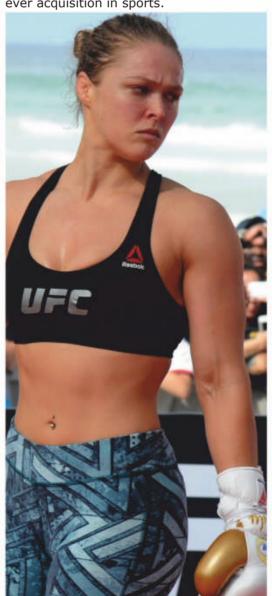
"There's no comparison," he told Berardino. "It's 'in addition to."

Dan Lambert, who in 2001 founded American Top Team, a primary team in MMA and whose fighters have competed over the years in many major promotions including UFC, PRIDE Fighting Championships, DREAM, K-1, Strikeforce, and Bellator, has his take on why MMA has surpassed boxing in popularity.

"I think boxing has always been star-driven, whereas MMA has a built-in portion of the audience that are pure fans of the sport and will tune in regardless of the main event," he said. "That's why you see such a difference. If you look at the empty seats during the prelims of a boxing event compared to those in attendance early on at an MMA event, MMA has many more people in the seats. I think it just comes down to the point that MMA is more exciting than boxing. There are so many more ways to win a fight in MMA as outcomes are unpredictable."

Unpredictable or not, UFC continued to evolve and as the rules continued to change, so did their roster of competitors. Hall of Famers Mark Coleman, Randy Couture, Matt Hughes, Chuck Liddell, Pat Miletich and Tito Ortiz all emerged from this era.

Today UFC produces events worldwide that showcase twelve weight divisions (eight men's divisions and four women's divisions) and abides by the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. Since its inception, UFC has held more than 500 events, and under White's stewardship as UFC president, the brand has grown into a globally recognized multi-billion-dollar enterprise. In 2016, Zuffa was sold to a group led by William Morris Endeavor (WME–IMG), including Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, MSD Capital and Silver Lake Partners for more than \$4 billion. It remains the largest-ever acquisition in sports.



Over time Brock Lesnar, Conor McGregor, Rhonda Rousey, and Anderson Silva all became household names. However, many would argue that Lesnar's fame came primarily from his time in pro wrestling with World Wrestling Entertainment.

In August 2017, pro boxing's biggest draw at the time - the undefeated eleven-time five-division boxing champion - Floyd "Money" Mayweather Jr., went head-to-head with two-division mixed martial arts (MMA) world champion and, at the time, UFC Lightweight Champion "The Notorious" Conor McGregor, in what was billed as "The Biggest Fight in Combat Sports History." While MMA fans called for the contest to be a boxing versus MMA bout, Mayweather's camp would have none of that, and the parties agreed to a twelve round boxing match. Although McGregor knew he would be at a disadvantage, he also knew this fight would be his career's biggest payoff. Pre-fight estimates put Mayweather's purse for the fight at a guaranteed \$100 million with the ability to earn upward of \$280

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million. In comparison, McGregor's purse was guaranteed at \$30 million with the ability to earn as much as \$75 million. Although both men signed non-disclosure agreements, during a Q&A session in Glasgow, Scotland, McGregor let it slip that he had earned a total of nearly \$100 million.

Mayweather defeated McGregor via technical knockout in the 10th round. There's no doubt in anyone's mind that if the fight would've been a mixed rules or straight MMA rules match, it would've been McGregor getting his hand raised in victory. Either way, the fight recorded the second highest pay-per-view buy rate in history.



For the most part, the boxing versus MMA debate has been put to bed, with MMA getting the clear-cut victory when it comes to popularity. Perhaps no event could highlight that more than that of the Mike Tyson versus Roy Jones Jr. fight that took place this past November. When the most talked about or anticipated boxing event in years is between a 54-year-old and a 51-year-old, there is something wrong with that picture. While the 8-round bout between the two former champions might have ended in a draw, the real winners were the promoters as all the event did for boxing was show how much the sport falls short when it comes to the current crop of fighters.

Still, some people don't know when to throw in the towel despite the war being over. Things began heating up once again between the two combat sports last spring just as the Covid-19 pandemic was starting to spread. In May 2020, Top Rank's Bob Arum and UFC's Dana White once again exchanged barbs, and as we go to press, their blood feud continues.

When UFC announced they would begin holding events again, Arum publicly criticized UFC's urgency for returning to holding events amid the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, Top Rank did not have any events scheduled, while the UFC had announced plans to run UFC 249 on May 9, followed by four other UFC events between May 13 and June 6.

"Good luck to them," Arum told *Boxingscene.com*. "I just hope that they're not endangering the safety of anyone. But this kind of cowboy behavior doesn't do anybody any good. We're looking now with Nevada, which we'll do in a sensible way, or California. We're working with [Nevada Athletic Commission executive director] Bob Bennett and [California State Athletic Commission executive officer] Andy Foster, and we're talking to the Texas commission. We're only [going to] do this if it's safe for the fighters and everyone involved, and if it's approved by the medical authorities. We're not [going to] be cowboys, like Dana White. I don't want to get politics involved, but I have really very little respect for Dana and what he's doing."

White struck back hard against Arum when on an episode of the podcast "UFC Unfiltered" he said: "Listen, I think by now everybody realizes that Bob Arum is a dickhead. This guy has been talking shit about the UFC and me for 20 years. He's fucking bankrupt, this guy. He's bankrupt. Of course, you don't want to put fights on. You can't afford to put fights on you fucking jackoff. You've been in this thing your whole life and have completely destroyed the business and the sport. Congratulations, Bob Arum. You're brilliant."

While the UFC was the first North American sport to return to action with UFC 249, Top Rank was quick to jump back on board with live events and returned to ESPN days before the UFC's June 6 event, drawing 370,000 viewers on June 2 and

311,000 on June 4, according to *Boxingscene.com*, making Arum look like a major hypocrite. White took notice.

According to a June 15 story on *foxnews.com* written by Ryan Gaydos, White said, "So many people are watching, this is everybody's time to shine. The sport is at a whole other level right now. You know what I mean? When we first started on ESPN, if you look at the ESPN totem pole, you had NFL, Major League Baseball, NBA, these guys, right? And we were down like; we were one notch above Cornhole. OK? Now we sit in a much better place on the ESPN totem pole than we did when we signed this deal a year and a half ago. By the way, Cornhole almost out-rated Top Rank the other night for their fights. So congratulations to Top Rank. Bob Arum, give him a shout out. Good job, Bob. You're fucking brilliant. You dickhead."

You'd figure that'd be the end of it, but no. In November 2020, the two were at it again. Arum, who has a long-standing history of knocking UFC for drastically underpaying their fighters because he claims they are a monopoly, told *The Athletic* he could "build a house in Beverly Hills" on the money he lost on fighter Terence Crawford over his last three fights.

When White caught wind of Arum's comments, he pulled no punches and immediately went into attack mode, calling Arum a "fucking scumbag" among other color expletives.

"Can you imagine if I said that," he asked reporters during a press conference for his Contender Series. "Are you fucking kidding me? You guys would murder me if I said that – I'd never hear the end of that."

Nor are we likely to hear the end of the battle between the 89-year-old Arum and the 51-year-old White until one of these two men have passed on, despite the fact that the final bell has rung on the fight between MMA and Boxing. Perhaps the two could settle the score at the next WrestleMania? But that's another discussion for another time. For now, ring the bell!



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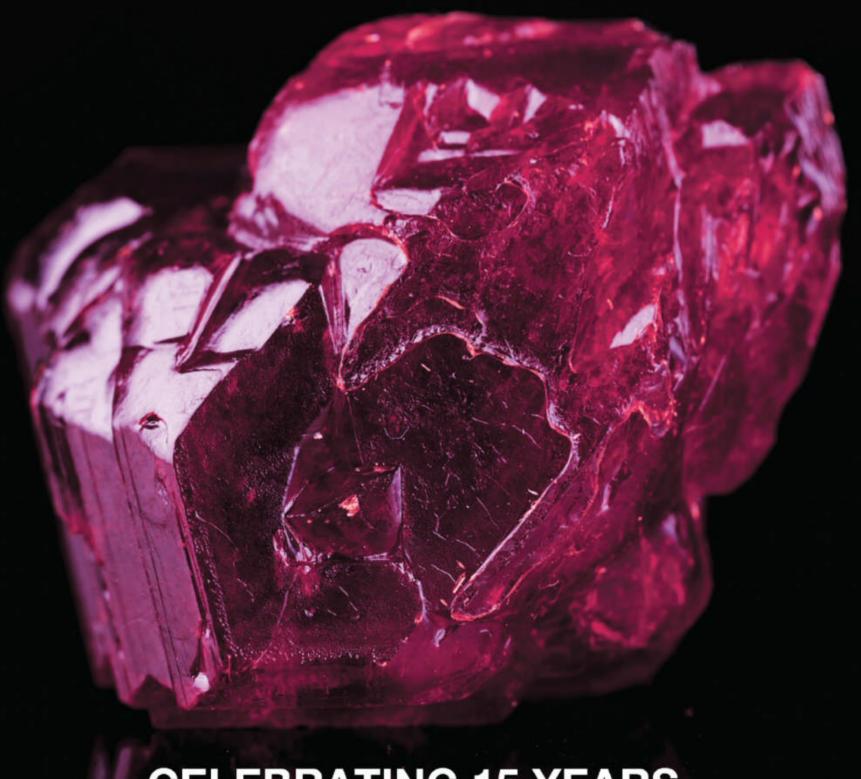
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